The Pre-Raphaelite Rebellion Against the British Royal Academy.

thelifeofmine3.wordpress.com/2024/07/31/the-pre-raphaelite-rebellion-against-the-british-royal-academy/

July 31, 2024

The Pre-Raphaelites opposed the British Royal Academy's focus on idealized and moral subjects, as well as its conventional standards of beauty based on early Italian Renaissance and Classical art. Instead, they drew inspiration from the period before Raphael, looking to the centuries before the High Renaissance. They believed that pre-Renaissance painters depicted nature and the human body more realistically, rather than idealistically. They also admired the collective guilds of medieval craftspeople, seeing them as an alternative to the mid-19th-century academic approach to art.

The Girlhood of Mary Virgin (1848-49)

Artist: Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Rossetti's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* was the first Pre-Raphaelite painting displayed publicly, featuring the initials "PRB" to denote the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The painting shows the Virgin Mary at home with her mother, St. Anne, and an angel, while

her father tends the garden outside. The style draws from late Medieval and early Renaissance art, rejecting traditional perspective for a flatter composition. This approach, along with the detailed religious symbolism and realistic portrayals, was controversial and challenged the norms celebrated by the British Academy.

Oil on canvas – Collection of the Tate, United Kingdom

Ophelia (1851-52)

Artist: John Everett Millais

Millais' *Ophelia*, often considered his masterpiece and a hallmark of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, depicts the tragic character from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Painted when Millais was just 22, the background was meticulously composed with detailed elements like flowers, reeds, and a water rat. Elizabeth Siddall modeled for Ophelia, who sinks into the river after going mad from Hamlet's rejection. Millais posed Siddall in a bathtub to capture the effect of water on her clothes and hair, leading to her near-death from pneumonia when the water's warmth faded. This work blends high realism with romantic drama, striving to recreate a fictional moment with intense detail.

Oil on canvas – Collection of the Tate, United Kingdom

Lady Lilith (1866-68)

Artist: Dante Gabriel Rossetti

In Rossetti's *Lady Lilith*, Lilith is depicted as a femme fatale, inspired by her portrayal in Goethe's *Faust* as a woman who ensnares men with her long hair. This painting reflects Victorian society's conflicted views on sexuality, where strict codes of behavior coexisted with a fascination for erotic symbolism. Rossetti's portrayal shows Lilith with mesmerizing beauty, her hair symbolizing enticement. Although she appears powerful, she gazes into a mirror, allowing the male viewer to observe her sexualized body. Thus, Lilith is both a powerful figure and an object of male pleasure, encapsulated within the confines of the painting.

Oil on canvas – Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware, USA

Laus Veneris (1873-78)

Artist: Edward Burne-Jones

In *Laus Veneris*, Burne-Jones illustrates a scene from the German legend of Tannhauser, where the knight Tannhauser, seduced by the goddess Venus, lives a life of sensual indulgence before repenting. The painting portrays Venus in a luxurious setting with her handmaidens, capturing a subtle eroticism. Burne-Jones blends fine and decorative arts, creating a tapestry-like effect with bold colors and intricate details. The painting's aesthetic, reminiscent of Swinburne's erotic poetry, emphasizes female beauty and sensuality, reflecting the modern and ornamental style that influenced the Aesthetic movement.

Oil on canvas – Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK